Seminar Papers: 5

MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

ZAKARIA BASHIER



The Islamic Foundation

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FOREWORD

The Islamic Foundation has been running its fortnightly seminar programmes for several years. The seminar is addressed by scholars and researchers both from the Foundation itself and from outside. In the past, a number of visiting professors and Muslim scholars from abroad have presented papers on a variety of topics. Some of these papers are of high academic standard and deserve wider circulation to researchers and scholars interested in the field. The Foundation now proposes to arrange its seminar programmes on a thematic basis.

An attempt is being made to publish some of the important papers. We hope to publish a series of such papers, based on the seminar programme, thoroughly revised and edited, the authors having taken into consideration the observations, suggestions and comments made by the participants in the seminar.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Dr. Zakaria Bashier's paper on 'Muslim Women in the Midst of Change'. Dr. Zakaria Bashier was born in the Sudan and was educated in Khartoum, Durham (England) and Pittsburgh (U.S.A.). He taught Islamic Studies at the King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, for a number of years and also served the Islamic Foundation as senior Research Fellow. At present he is teaching Philosophy at the University of Khartoum. Dr. Bashier has written books on the Sirah of the Prophet and the concept of social change in Islam, and has contributed papers on a variety of topics at international seminars and conferences. The topic of 'Women in Islam' has long been a subject of heated discussion and controversy among scholars in both East and West. Several authors have produced books and pamphlets on this topic. Dr. Zakaria Bashier in this short paper has made a successful attempt to summarize

the viewpoint of different scholars and vindicate the 'Traditional viewpoint' based on the strict interpretation of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. I hope his researches on an issue of such importance will give new direction and a fresh approach to all who want to uphold the Islamic viewpoint without in any way compromising with modern Western culture.

I pray to Allah to accept our humble effort and make it a source of inspiration and guidance for all.

M.M. Ahsan

20th January, 1980 — Chairman, Seminar Programme

1st Rabi' al-Awwal, 1400 H. — The Islamic Foundation.

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I would like to express my sincerest thanks to all brothers who helped me, first by suggesting that I write this paper, and then by revising it for publication. Since the paper was intended for a short seminar, I was not able to do justice to all of its aspects, and I feel there are some areas which still need further elaboration. I hope readers will help me by giving their constructive suggestions for improving the presentation in future editions. I am grateful to brother Manazir Ahsan for his help in the finalization of the paper, also to brother Muhtar Holland and Mr. E. Fox for their help and suggestions.

21st November, 1979. Zakaria Bashier.

1st Muharram, 1400 H.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

Prologue

In the Muslim world today, a fierce battle rages over the status of Muslim women. Discussion and controversy verge upon conflict and social strife. In this essay, we shall attempt to isolate some of the main issues around which this conflict centres. We shall also attempt to identify the major trends that are parties to this conflict. The question of the role of women in society is one of the issues that will play an important part in setting the trend and direction of social change and development in the contemporary Islamic world.

This controversy concerning the role of Muslim women in the New Awareness which is gradually gathering momentum in the Muslim world today was given a strong impetus by an important treatise by the Sudanese Muslim intellectual, Dr. Hasan Turābī, leader of the Islamic Charter Front. Dr. Turābī's article, entitled "Kayfa Tanhad al-Mar'ah" is translated into English and published in *The Muslim* under the title: "The Reawakening of Muslim Women".[1] This article has provoked a major controversy in the Sudan and in Muslim intellectual circles in the Arabic world (the original essay was, of course, written in Arabic). Many objectors described the essay as excessively liberal in its contentions, while others contested the validity of its juristic presuppositions.

In what follows, I shall attempt to examine the traditional views on women in the light of the recent controversy. I shall try to restate those traditional views in the strongest possible formulation they can assume. The idea is that once

1. *The Muslim*, Vol. XIV. No.2, London. Dec., Jan., Feb., March 1972.

we have given a strong and clear formulation of those views, one that is both fair and objective and as sympathetic as possible, we shall then be in a position to judge, once and for all, the recent attempts to refute them.

The Main Areas of Controversy

The discussions about the status of Muslim women in Islamic society revolve around many issues. The following are some of the major issues involved.

1. Controversy rages concerning the nature of women and whether this nature is significantly different from that of men. What are the aspects of this alleged difference? And does this difference, if it exists, entail any interesting sociological consequences which would justify the Islamic tendency to accord a special character to the place and role of women in society?

2. What is the relation of women to men? Is it one of absolute equality? Or are there certain fields and areas in which men in general can attain superiority over women in general, where he is naturally qualified for leadership and guardianship over women?

3. Controversy also rages over the rights of the two sexes. Should those rights be identically equal in all circumstances or are there certain contexts in which discrimination in favour of men could be more equitable and equalitarian, and where identity and absolute equality would be less so?

4. Discussion also arises concerning the role a women is expected to play in the public sphere and in society at large

and whether this role can be reconciled with her basic role as the mainstay of family life.

5. Related to the issue of women's social role is the question of the manner in which she is to mix with men outside the circle of close relatives and members of the family, how she is to dress in public, and so on.

Underlying the concern and anxiety over the changing role of Muslim women is a profound suspicion of the new ideas emanating mainly from the post-Christian West. Concerned Muslims believe that Western attitudes towards the status of women are not only harmful and incorrect in themselves, but are actually undermining the very foundation of their society. In view of the fundamental position which the family occupies in the fabric of Muslim society, this profound concern is quite understandable. The demise of the family is tantamount to the demise of the whole society. And of course central to the family matrix is the wife and mother. If Western cultural domination succeeds in alienating the Muslim woman from her cultural values, the whole society will be profoundly transformed. If there is a mastermind, a malignant genius who is bent on undermining and destroying the Muslim societies, then he could not do better than concentrate his efforts on uprooting woman from her cultural identification with Islamic social values and norms of conduct.

Muslim social thinkers concerned with the question of women adopt various stances in connection with the issues which we have outlined in the preceding paragraphs. We can identify at least three main trends amongst them.

The Conservative Traditional Trend

Expressed in an extreme form, this traditional view believes that the woman should be lodged safely at home, never venturing outside except when there is an obvious necessity for her to do so. Thus the woman is a prisoner in her own home. She has no public or social role to play outside the domain of her house and beyond her role as a housewife and a mother. This view is based upon the conception of woman as a total *'awrah* (an object of concealment). Even her voice, her countenance and the sounds she makes are all *'awrah*. She is viewed as a weak creature, easily susceptible to infatuations and seduction.

A more moderate trend within Traditionalism allows more freedom and scope for the woman outside her little kingdom of the house. However, it is insisted that she must cover herself completely, face included, when she goes outside the house. Even the moderate Traditionalists will not contemplate any public role for a woman. At most, she would be allowed to go out for social visits and the like. Shopping is frowned upon and going to the mosque for prayer is positively discouraged.

The Moderate Trend

Advocates of the Moderate Trend, although they believe the essential role of the woman and her basic function to be that of wife and mother, accord greater public responsibility to the woman. They believe that a certain involvement in social and public affairs is rendered essential by her more basic role as a mother and upbringer of the future generation. Her role as educator necessitates her performing a role in the public affairs of society. She must participate in those affairs, outside the scope of the house. They be-

lieve that this public involvement and participation is important for a better performance of her more private role as wife and mother. Participation in public affairs helps the woman to discharge her basic role as wife and mother in a superior way. The essence of education in general, whether it takes place at school or at home, is to create a good human being and a good member of society. Now, if a Muslim woman is expected to educate future generations and prepare them for their future life as good human beings, she must be given a basic training and a basic experience of what public life is and what public interest is all about.

Naturally, supporters of the Moderate Trend go to great pains to emphasize that the woman's public role must always be checked against her more primary role at home as a wife and mother. The moderate adopts a tolerant position vis-a-vis the less extreme faction of the Traditionalists. For one thing, they concede to them certain positions upon which they insist. For instance, one issue which is very important to the moderate Traditionalist is that of the veiling *(hijāb)* of the face. The Moderates seem to accept the view that (a) the veil was enforced during the first age of Islam; (b) that it has continued to exist, in some Muslim societies, e.g. Saudi Arabia, until the present day; and (c) that it has a basis in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. However, they do not subscribe to the view (accepted by all Traditionalists, moderates as well as extremists) that the veiling of the face is obligatory for all Muslim women. They accept the view that it was obligatory for the wives of the Prophet and as such was a special rule and cannot have universal application. It is indeed accepted by Muslim jurists of all persuasions that the wives of the Prophet were singled out for special obligations and special privileges. If it so happened that other Muslim women followed the example of the wives of the Prophet in veiling their faces (and this tradition has

continued up to the present time in most Muslim countries), this is not sufficient to establish that veiling is obligatory. At most, it could only establish that veiling is commendable and desirable, especially for young, beautiful women. It does become obligatory if the woman's beauty is so exceptional that it becomes a real cause of infatuation and seduction.

The Liberal Trend

The Liberal Progressive Trend, so called, is adamant in its resolve to push the Muslim woman out of her home and into the broad avenues of society. There are even incidents of those Liberals, in countries where they have managed to assume political authority, using the state's power to order and force a sizeable participation of women in public affairs, without heeding the morally undesirable repercussions of such participation. In fact, there is circumstantial evidence to the effect that those undesirable moral repercussions, far from being unpredicted by them, were in fact consciously cultivated and fostered. The Liberal Progressive Trend, so called, is deliberately, by design and not by accident, bent on uprooting the Islamic values that for so long have acted as the cement and cohesive force in our society. Aware that the family institution is the very bedrock of our society, it maliciously directed concerted efforts to weaken and destroy it. If this evil design were to succeed, then the task of demolishing our Islamic society would be complete and final.

It is not our concern, in this paper, to unravel the ways and strategies adopted by the Liberal Permissive Trend. This trend does not deserve, in our view the academic respectability which would demand that it receive systematic treatment and discussion. Therefore, we can call for the

adoption of an attitude which would condemn it as ill-conceived and destructive and, therefore to be fought and defeated rather than discussed and criticized.

Thus, our main preoccupation in this paper will be with the first two trends, the Traditional and the Moderate. With respect to the first, we shall attempt to give it as powerful a re-statement as possible. Then we shall critically examine its main contention. If the Traditional Trend can withstand our critical examination this will, by implication, serve to weaken the rival Moderate Trend and vice versa. Dr. Hasan al-Turābī's views fall firmly within the Moderate tradition, although they are generally less restrictive and more positive than any Moderate has advocated before. They are more positive in the sense that they assign an unambiguous role to the Muslim woman. Turabi goes far beyond any previous Moderate, in that he favours:

1. An enlarged social role for the Muslim woman, including her right to participate in the political process by nominating and electioneering on behalf of a candidate seeking even the highest Muslim office of *Khalifah*. Her right to consultation in political matters, as well as her right to stand for any public office, (except the office of *Khalifah)*, is emphatically asserted and defended.

2. Turābī maintains that veiling, in the sense of covering the face, was peculiar to the wives of the Prophet, and is not required generally of Muslim women.

3. He asserts the permissibility of the intermingling of the two sexes in places of worship, in education and decent, innocent family gatherings. He maintains that the Muslim woman can receive guests of the family at home, converse with them, eat with them and serve them.

He claims to possess conclusive juristic supporting evidence for these theses from the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. Indeed, the very opening paragraph of his essay talks about referring any disagreement about the status or the rights of the Muslim woman to the ruling of the Qur'ān. Dr. Turābī believes that the Traditional Trend is not only without a valid *Sharī'ah* basis, but is also completely obsolete. It is only a matter of time before it collapses completely, no matter how loud the outcry of the Traditionalists. It will collapse not so much because of the strong winds of social change blowing across the plains of the Muslim world from Occidental terrain, but because it is an untenable and indefensible position. Dr. Turābī calls upon Islamists throughout the Islamic world to take the initiative in introducing social reform in the affairs of Muslim women. He calls upon them to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards the circumstances which rule the conditions and affairs of Muslim women. Those conditions are as much a product of unjust and oppressive circumstances in past ages as they are dim reflection of ill-understood Islamic ideas and social beliefs. The only way to harness a social rebellion by Muslim women is to introduce enlightened reform based on the authentic presuppositions of Islam in this respect, argues Dr. Turabi.

So, it is clear that Dr. Turābī's position clashes head on with the Traditional Trend. Also many Moderates are bound to feel that he has gone beyond what is warranted, and that perhaps he has been influenced more than he should have been by the prospect of women deserting their Islamic heritage.

Deferring elaborate comment on Turābī's paper for another occasion, we shall concentrate on our stated intention to subject the Traditional Trend to a thorough scrutiny. We shall attempt an analytical criticism of their main tenets, examining the supportive juristic evidence from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* upon which the Traditionalists claim to

rest their case.

An Examination of the Traditional Trend

In order to make our paper manageable, let us isolate some major theses central to the Traditional Trend and concentrate our analytical tools upon them.

We, therefore, propose to tackle the following issues:

1. Veiling of the face.
2. The public social role of women and their participation in social activities.
3. An outline of the portrait of the social role of women in the early society of the Prophet (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him), as also an analysis of the lives and examples of some prominent Muslim women.

Veiling of the Face

No doubt this is an important issue. Perhaps its methodological implications are more important than its substantive ones. What I mean by this is that, although veiling the face is not the central issue with respect to the status and role of the Muslim woman, it does tend to indicate the different outlooks adopted by various schools of thought in this respect.Thus those who adopt a tough stand upon it, declaring it to be obligatory, are most likely to favour a reduced social role for women in society. They are also expected to favour more seclusion for women and opt for a generally sex-segregated society with separate, un-intermingling male and female communities.

For these reasons, the issue of veiling the face acquires a certain methodological primarial position in our treatment. However, it is also interesting from the point of view of the exegesis of the Islamic texts concerned. After all, the

dispute over the veil issue is not a verbal dispute. It centres around a hard corpus of Qur'ānic and *Sunnah* texts. In a way, it has a great symbolic significance, because, though it is not the central or most substantive issue in the question of Muslim women and their status in society, it does tend to signify a central feature and major theme in the Islamic sociological outlook on women. This is the theme that Islam, as a value system, and as a code of conduct which represents a social model, lays a high premium on the question of chastity and purity of the body as well as the soul. This emphasis on the purity and chastity of feelings and manners somehow finds its focus on the question of women and the related topics whose main agent and actress is the woman. In a sense the whole moral issue which, indeed, has a wider context than that of the woman, is here at stake. In so much as the moral question is of great concern in the value system of Islam and a central point of its code of conduct, then the very special status and the very careful delimiting of the role of women in society becomes an intelligible position. If we accept the Islamic emphasis on the issue of private, sexual morality, then we must be prepared to accept the restrictions which it places upon the public role of the Muslim woman. If we accept that the very physical presence of women could be an object of infatuation and even seduction, and if we accept the Islamic position that extramarital relations are taboo, then we must, necessarily accept the special restrictions and the special role which Islam carefully tailors and cultivates for the Muslim woman. The Muslim veil symbolizes these special restrictions which Islam places on the public appearance and the public conduct of Muslim women. We shall not be reasonable if we reject totally the Muslim veil and what it stands for and at the same time insist on maintaining the Muslim code of conduct, and the Muslim model of social interaction.

The Traditional Position on the Veiling of Women

The Traditional view on the veiling of the Muslim woman is that the veiling is a complete covering of the total body of the woman, including her face. Not only is her whole body an *'awrah* (object of concealment) but so also is her voice. The Muslim woman is called upon to comply with the requirement of veiling as a matter of religious obligation *(farḍ)*, the omission of which is a punishable offence. This view is widespread in countries lucky enough to escape Western domination in the form of colonialism, e.g. Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf States. It is also the position adopted by many Hanbali Jurists, notably the powerful Ibn Taymiyyah.

In more recent times, the Traditional position with respect to the veiling of women is advocated by the Saudi Jurists, followers of Imām Muḥammad ibn Wahhāb. Their views on this and other Islamic matters are heeded by the Saudi State. However, this position received a systematic treatment by the Pakistani scholar and *Dā'iyah*, Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī. In his book, *al-Ḥijāb*, he advocated the view that covering the face is part of the Muslim woman's veil. Mawlānā Mawdūdī is not a Traditionalist in many of his views, but he is on the question of women.

Arguments in Support of the Traditional Position

The main arguments which seem to support covering the face, as advanced by the Traditionalists, are the following:

1. Verse 59 of *Sūrah al Aḥzāb* (The Confederates)
   This is the famous verse of *Al-Jalābīb*

   "O Prophet! Say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks *(Jalābīb)* close to themselves, so it is like-

lier they will be known, and not hurt. God is All Forgiving, All Compassionate."

The Traditionalists claim three things with respect to this verse:

(a) That the drawing close of the *Jalābīb* referred to covering the whole body, the face included.

(b) That it is perfectly general in its scope and intent and says so explicitly. There is, thus no question that it may not apply to Muslim women generally.

(c) That many early interpreters of the Qur'ān, e.g. Ibn 'Abbās, have actually inferred from verse 59 of *al-Aḥzāb* that it also requires covering the face, as part and parcel of the general order to draw the *Jalābīb* closer.

2. Verse 31 of *Sūrah al-Nūr* (The Light)

This verse reads as follows:

"Say (O Muhammad) to the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and reveal not their ornament save such as reveals itself from it, and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment, except to their own husbands or fathers or husband's fathers, or their sons or their husband's sons, or their brothers or their brother's sons or sister's sons, or their women, or what their right hands possess, or such men as attend them, not of those having sexual desire, or children who have not yet attained knowledge of women's private parts; nor let them stamp their feet so that their hidden ornament may be known..."

Now, with respect to this verse, the Traditionalists hold that, in the wake of its revelation, the women of the *Anṣār* in Madina hastened to cover their head and face (at least portions of them) with black veils, and afterwards appeared in the Prophet's mosque covered with black as if there were crows on their heads. Not only did the wives of the Prophet comply with this practice, but also the vast majority of the Muslim women.

Historical Evidence that Veiling of the Face was Universally Observed

They also advance historical evidence to the effect that veiling the face was universally observed in the first Muslim society, i.e. in the days of the Prophet (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him) and his Rightly Guided Caliphs. A *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of the Prophet's wife, 'A'isha, states that she and the Muslim women in her entourage, when accompanying the Prophet on military excursions, used to cover their faces when men travellers passed by them and uncover them when no men were around.

The Existence of a Continued Living Social Tradition of Veiling the Face

One of the major points of the Traditionalists is that there is a living, unbroken social custom of veiling the face, which has been in existence in almost all Muslim countries until the present time. In Muslim countries which were not subjected to Western colonial powers, e.g. the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, North Yemen and the Gulf) the veil continues to the present day. In other Muslim countries, which were not so lucky, the veil continued until the thirties and the forties of this century in the major urban centres, and until the present day in the remote rural areas,

unaffected by Westernization.

The writer of this essay bears witness to the truth of the above statement. As a little boy, he recollects very vividly that women, in his native town in the Northern Province of the Sudan, used to cover all the face, except the eyes, when they ventured outside their homes, which was a rare happening, especially during the day. This practice of covering the face (which was called *Tabalaum*, in the colloquial northern Sudanese dialect) continued until the late forties in the Sudan. This was more or less the case in countries like Egypt, Morocco, Syria and Iraq.

These are perhaps the main features of the Traditional Trend on the veil. The extreme form of this trend prescribes a near total ban on women's appearance in public. For them, the Muslim woman ought to stay at home and never venture outside, unless it is absolutely necessary for her to do so. We reject this extreme position, because the Qur'ān has only authorized such an imprisonment at home in the case of Muslim women who commit an indecency. To suppose that it is the normal way of life for her is a grave misunderstanding of Islam. Unfortunately, this extreme form of the Traditional Trend still exists in parts of the Muslim world today, though it is slowly dying out.

The Moderate Trend on Veiling

The main exponents of the Moderate Trend on the veiling of Muslim women are such men as Sayyid Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Syria), Sayyid al-Bahī al-Khūlī (Egypt), Sayyid Quṭb and Muḥammad Quṭb (Egypt), Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (Egypt), and Dr. Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī (Syria).

Advocates of the Moderate Trend do not dispute the importance or the obligations of the veil *(ḥijāb)* for Muslim women. They only assert that it does not include covering

the face or the hands. Al-Albānī, who was the original jurist to state the Moderate Trend, did not say that veiling the face is not part of the Muslim woman's *ḥijāb*. All that he said is that covering the face, though it may be commendable and desired, and indeed even obligatory for women of exceptional infatuating beauty, is generally not obligatory. It was only obligatory for the wives of the Prophet. The fact that some Muslims observed it, both in the times of the Prophet and in later generations, must be explained as a pious act and as following the example of the Prophet's wives, without this being an obligation. It was an act of love and devotion, complying voluntarily with that which is desirable and commendable *(mustahab)*. Al-Albānī has set out those views in a well-known book called *Ḥijāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fī al-kitāb wa al-Sunnah (Manshūrāt-al-Maktab al-Islāmī)*. This book has been condemned by the traditional 'Ulamā' in Saudi Arabia, and was banned there for a number of years. The book is now found in some libraries in Saudi Arabia, although it continues to be officially banned. Prof. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (Egypt) was severely criticized when he publicly defended the view in a forum organized by the Muslim World League in 1976 in Makka.

The views of Dr. Turabi of course go far beyond what al-Albānī is likely to grant. For this reason, his classification among the Moderates is only a matter of methodological simplicity. If a more detailed study is undertaken, it will be better to place him in a category of his own.

The Main Arguments for the Moderate Trend

The following are the main arguments that can be advanced in support of the Moderate Trend on veiling:

1. Verse 59 of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* (The Confederates), the

so-called verse of the *Jalābīb*, does not really, in any obvious way, entail the proposition that the face should be covered let alone the proposition that such covering is actually *wājib* (obligatory). No reference to covering the face can be inferred from it. If it is true that this verse has been interpreted by many early Qur'ānic interpreters *(mufassirin)* as mandating and commanding covering of the face, those interpretations are neither binding nor conclusive, in the opinion of these Moderates.

2. With respect to verses 30 and 31 of *Sūrah al-Nūr* (The Light), the Moderates claim them to be evidence of a logical compelling force which provides conclusive vindication of their position that (a) veiling the face is not obligatory and (b) that as a matter of fact many Muslim women in Madina used to go around with their faces unveiled. Otherwise, argue the Moderates, how can we make any sense of the command to the men, embodied in verse 30, to lower their gaze? Incidentally, verse 31 (The Light) does not refer to covering the face at all. The injunction to the Muslim women is that they should cast their shawls *(Khurmurihinn)* upon their bosoms. Now, some of the women of pre-Islamic times used to have their hair, necks and breasts exposed. Verse 31 was meant to reform this social habit.

3. At the core of the Moderates' evidence are two Sayings of the Prophet (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him). These are the following:

The First Ḥadīth

'Ā'isha, mother of the Faithful, has narrated that her sister Asmā', daughter of Abū Bakr, entered into the presence of the Prophet (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of God turned

away from her and said:

> "O Asmā', when a woman reaches menstruation then it would not be right for any part of her to be seen (by alien men) save this and this," (and he pointed to his face and hands). Related by Abū Dāwūd, it is a *Mursal Ḥadīth*.

The Second Ḥadīth

Also narrated by 'Ā'isha, who says: Once my half brother from my mother ('Abdullāh', son of al-Ṭufail) came to visit me. He brought with him his young daughter, who was in her full ornament. The Prophet then entered and seeing her, he turned away from her. I said "O Messenger of God, she is only the daughter of my brother, a mere maiden." He said:

> "O 'Ā'isha, when a woman reaches puberty then it is not permitted that any part of her body should be seen (by aliens) except her face and what is below this" (and he clenched his arm just above the joint of the hand leaving a space in between for another clench of his fist).

This second *Ḥadīth* (or second version of the first *Ḥadīth)* is narrated by al-Ṭabari in his commentary on the Qur'ān.

4. Verse 31 (The Light) in Another Context

The verse which we have quoted earlier prohibited women from showing their ornament "except that which shows by itself", *"illā mā Zahara minhā"*. Now, all commentators who subscribe to the Moderate Trend would interpret this

verse as permitting such ornaments as would manifest themselves naturally on the face and the hands. Examples of such permitted ornaments are finger rings, eye make up *(Kuhul)* and the henna on the hands. The Moderates would say that this is another logical point. If nothing at all can be seen of the woman, what sense can be made of the Qur'ānic phrase at issue. On the other hand, the Traditionalists would give this phrase an empty significance. They would claim that it refers to the most outward garment, which is the Arabic word *jilbāb* (cloak). This is the ornament that manifests itself, and cannot be concealed, and thus it is alright to have it ornamented. But they would say in another context that the *jilbāb* could only be of a plain black colour.

5. Further Evidence in Support of the Moderate Trend

For our part, and quite independently of the Moderates, we can marshal the following evidence in support of the Moderate Trend:

1. From a general Islamic perspective, it is well known that Islam has given Muslim women the following Moderate Trend:

   (a) The right of private ownership and of running and managing her property holdings and her wealth, including the actual running of a business and involvement in trading. She can do all of this in person and need not appoint a deputy or official. In fact, in the early society of the Prophet and his Caliphs, women formed part of the market, as traders. The Caliph 'Umar even appointed a woman supervisor to control prices and maintain a governmental watch over business transactions.

(b) She has the right to participate in debates and public discussion, political or otherwise; and has the right to state her opinion in those discussions. She may also attend festivals and celebrations.

(c) She has the right to involve herself in public political affairs, and practise her right of electing the highest government official and may demand and practise a right to consultation on the highest political affairs.

(d) She can act as a witness in law courts and can participate in wars, if she chooses, although this is not obligatory upon her. Moreover, she can hold a teaching position and the official post of fātūrah in *Fiqh* (witness the example of Mother 'Ā'isha, may God be pleased with her).

Further Textual Evidence from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah

The Qur'ān addresses its call to men and women equally, and summons both sexes to accept the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him). More specifically, it places the responsibility for accepting the call to *Tawḥīd* and absolute monotheism, and for the peaceful dissemination of it, upon both men and women. Thus the responsibility for setting up an Islamic community is a collective one and is one that ought to be shouldered by Muslim men and women equally.

> "And their Lord has answered their prayer: I waste not the work of any worker amongst you, male or female. You are parts of each other. Thus those who emigrated and were expelled

from their homes and were hurt in My way, them I shall surely acquit of their evil deeds, and I shall admit them to Gardens underneath which rivers flow..."[1]

"And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey God and His Messenger..."[2]

The above verses between them mention all of the rights and privileges in which women are permitted to participate and which we discussed in the preceding paragraphs, viz. emigration, struggle and *Jihād*, propagation activity *(da'wah)*, enjoining good deeds, prohibiting evil deeds, making *salāt*, paying *zakāt* and obeying the political and religious authority of God and His messenger. In all those aspects, no discrimination exists between men and women in Islam.

More Ḥadīths in Favour of the Moderate Trend

Further *ahādīth* can be quoted in defence of the Moderate Trend, both on the veil and related issues.

On the authority of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib, it is related that on the first day of *'Id al-Adhā* (after the casting of *al-jamrāt)*, al-Faḍl was riding behind the Prophet on his she-camel. An exceptionally beautiful Muslim woman of the Tribe of Khaytham intercepted the Prophet to ask him some questions

1. Qur'ān, 3:95
2. Qur'ān, 9:71

Al-Faḍl looked at her and she looked at him. Incidentally, al-Faḍl was exceptionally handsome, as indeed were the majority of the young Hashimites, the Prophet included. The Prophet noticed the exchange of looks. He therefore, turned al-Faḍl to face away from the woman. But al-Faḍl looked again. And again, the Prophet turned his face away, saying: "Here is a young man and a young woman with respect to whom I cannot rest assured about the temptations of Satan".

On the authority of Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh, the Prophet (blessings of Allah and peace be upon him) went to a gathering of women and addressing them, he said: "Give alms and charities because the majority of you will be fuel for Hell-Fire". A woman arose from amidst them, her cheeks blackened and said: "Why, O Messenger of God?" He said: "Because you make too many complaints, and you show ingratitude towards your husband".

Moreover, there are the incidents of women attending the public lesson sessions which the Prophet used to give. They asked many questions, and the Prophet would answer them patiently. Some of the topics discussed touched upon private matters, such as the sexual relations between husbands and wives and the importance of safeguarding the private nature of the bedroom talk and happenings between husbands and wives. At first, the Prophet's seminar consisted of men and women. Then the women demanded and obtained a separate seminar because they had difficulty hearing what the Prophet said. The men used to sit close to him, while the women could only sit far away to the back.

The women, of course, used to attend prayers in the Mosque, including the Prophet's Mosque. The incident of the woman who, in congregational prayer on a Friday, questioned the Caliph 'Umar's statement concerning the bride's dowry and proved him wrong, is well known.

The Traditionalist Rebuttal of the Moderate Trend

The Traditionalists advance the following objections to the proofs put forward by their adversaries, the Moderates:

1. Verse 59 of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb

(a) Almost all the early commentators interpreted it as calling for covering the face.

(b) It is the only evidence which can be invoked to explain the universal observance of veiling the face in the Prophet's day.

(c) There is nothing in it which suggests that the commandment to cover the face is not mandatory or commendable

(d) And, of course, it cannot be claimed with respect to it that it is restricted in its scope to the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad, because it explicitly makes a public address to all Muslim women.

2. Verses 30 and 31 of Sūrah al-Nūr

The commandment to cast down the eyes could not be invoked to warrant an inference, logical or otherwise, that some Muslim women of the Prophet's time went about unveiled, with their faces exposed. There were a lot of *Kitābiyah* (Jewish and Christian women) in Madina who did not observe veiling the face. Besides, there were the Imā' (women slaves) who were mainly Persians, Syrians and the like. Now, those, too, used to go around with their faces, heads and bosoms uncovered. It is in this context that verse 59 of *Sūrah al-Aḥzāb* ordered Muslim women to be

identifiable from women slaves by covering up their bodies, by drawing their *jalābīb* close to themselves.

3. Most important, they say, there is an obvious weakness in both *Ḥadīths* which represent the backbone in the supportive evidence of the Moderates.

   As to the first *Ḥadīth*, it suffers both from an *isnād* flaw and a *matn* flaw.

   (a) The *isnād* flaw (flaw in the chain of narrators) is due to the presence of Khālid ibn Darak in its chain of narrators. Khālid was not contemporaneous with Mother 'Ā'isha and so could not have listened to her or indeed ever met her. Thus, this Ḥadīth is a *mursal* (there is a break in the chain of its narrators).

   (b) But the *matn* flaw is even more serious, because it suggests that Asmā', sister of 'Ā'isha, daughter of Abū Bakr, wife of al-Zubair ibn al-'Awām, and subsequent mother of the renowned Abdullāh ibn al-Zubair, could appear in front of the Prophet wearing such thin clothes. Knowing the character of Asmā' and her struggle in early Islam, together with her stern character, the writer of this essay agrees fully that this is a valid point.

Now, with regard to the second *Ḥadīth*, there is a flaw in the *isnād*. Though the narrator was regarded as trustworthy (a *thiqah*), yet when his *Ḥadīth* books were accidentally destroyed he continued to narrate *Ḥadīth* from memory. Objections were raised against him and ultimately affected his authority. I believe al-Albānī himself was prepared to accept this objection against this *Ḥadīth*.

Thus the most substantial evidential support for the Moderate Trend is weakened. Many writers on the issue of Muslim women, including well-known writers like Sayyid Quṭb, Dr. Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, Dr. Hasan al-Turābī and Al-Bahī al-Khūlī did show sensitivity towards this. I believe that if those two *Ḥadīths* warranting unveiling the face are considerably weakened, then the Moderate Trend will lose a great deal of its appeal. No matter how weighty are rational considerations on a particular ruling in Islam, the crucial test is its textual supportive evidence from the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

4. The Traditionalists also dismiss the Moderate interpretation of the Qur'ānic phrase "Illā mā Zahara minhā" "except what manifests itself from it (women's ornaments)". They say that this phrase only refers to the most outward *jilbāb* or cloak whose outward appearance is inevitable.

5. The incident of al-Faḍl ibn al-'Abbās is dismissed because, so argue the advocates of the Traditional Trend, the Khaythamiah woman was still a *muhrimah* (i.e. a pilgrim) and as such, she was permitted according to the rules of the *Ḥajj* to unveil her face. The fact that the meeting took place on the *'Īd* Day, which is the same day on which pilgrims end their state of *Iḥrām*, at least throws some doubt on whether the Khaythamiah woman was actually in *Iḥrām*.

6. The case of the woman who demanded and obtained an explanation as to why most women go to Hell is also dismissed by the Traditionalists. They seize upon the descriptive phrase that the woman's cheeks were off-colour somewhat and appeared darker than the rest of her face. They interpret this as an allusion

to the woman's lack of beauty, and as such, there was no reason for her to be veiled. This also seems, to me at any rate, to be a valid point.

Conclusion

Two things remain to be said:

1. I believe that the Traditional Trend deserves more attention. Their objections must be met and given a valid rebuttal if the Moderate Trend is to be officially adopted by the Modern Islamic Revivalists. Certainly, Dr. Turābī's thesis will not secure general acceptance, let alone a concensus, if the Traditional Trend is not conclusively refuted.

2. The second point serves only to indicate the pressing need for new research into the position of Muslim women in the First Muslim Age. Such research is vital for our present topic.

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